SYNOPSIS

Title: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE VISHACHIKITSA TRADITION IN KERALA

Introduction:

Kerala is one of the states in India with high snake bite prevalence besides Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra. The state's rain forests, tropical deciduous forests, and grasslands are inhabited by extraordinary varieties of plant and animal life including venomous snakes, spiders, scorpions, wasps and poisonous plants. Majority of the population lead an agrarian livelihood which increased the chances of envenomation. Increased incidence rate lead to the demand of an efficient poison management system. This branch of Ayurveda has been developed especially in Kerala by native indigenous practitioners of poison-healing, popularly known as Vishavaidyas, to meet the needs of patients of poisoning.

The vishavaidyas of Kerala have dealt with almost all kinds of poisonings. They have scribed down their expert knowledge mainly in Malayalam and Sanskrit languages. Enormous literature is available on Vishachikitsa in Malayalam and Sanskrit as palm scripts and books like Vishavaidya Jyotsnika, Prayogasamuchayam, Lakshanamrutham and Kriyakaumudi. There were different schools of traditional poison-healing systems in Kerala and practitioners from various social strata have been trained by the experts of these schools. Until two decades ago, Keralites preferred Ayurvedic management for all types of toxic afflictions than the allopathic medications. Even today, in rural areas of Kerala, many poisonous bite victims are rushed to Ayurvedic centers for treatment. It is said that many dedicated vishavaidyas who were eminent in Jyotisha also could even prognosticate the arrival of a bite victim, his place of bite and could even prepare medicines for the particular bite.
The present study is a humble effort to study Kerala’s Vishachikitsa tradition and the special treatment practices in this field.

**Relevance of the present study:**

The Vishachikitsa tradition of Kerala, its origin, development, exclusive treatment practices and contributions to the field of Vishachikitsa is an unexplored area of research. The lack of systematic academic research in this area is a serious handicap. The present generation should be aware of this age-old treasure of our land, otherwise it will be lost in oblivion.

In this study, an attempt is made to demystify and scientifically approach Kerala’s clinical and literary contributions to the branch of Agada tantra in Ayurveda through a systematic methodology. The differences in practices across the state, the causes of its decline along with the scope of revival are also discussed by meeting the masters in the field directly. The method of training attained, books followed, biographical sketch, routines in life, methods of diagnosis and clinical management are also studied. It may help and encourage students and researchers on the subject for further research and will also add to the wealth of knowledge and literature in the area.

**Previous Works:**


Aims and objectives:

- To study the contributions of indigenous Vishachikitsa tradition of Kerala to the broader system of Vishachikitsa in Ayurveda.
- To examine the clinical practices and literary contributions of Vishachikitsa tradition of Kerala to the field of Vishachikitsa in Ayurveda.
- To explore the reasons for its decline and chances of revival

Materials and methods:

Study design

The study was designed in two phases:

- A literary review
- A survey study through in-depth interview

Tools

- A semi-structured questionnaire was designed with open end questions for conducting in-depth interviews with the participants of the survey.
- A consent form was prepared

Study setting

The study was confined to the state of Kerala by meeting all the living practitioners of traditional Vishachikitsa satisfying the selection criteria.

Study population

All the known traditional Vishachikitsa practitioners of Kerala who can provide the necessary information and can comprehend the questions with sufficient intact cognition and sensorium and who satisfied the selection criteria of authenticity and experience
Sample size

The entire population satisfying the selection criteria was included

Sampling method

Purposive sampling

Data collection

- A literary review was done in selected libraries within the state.
- The interview survey across Kerala covering a road distance of 2400 kilometres was completed in two phases. Each interview was documented in audio-visual format in a time frame of 90-150 minutes. The data was segregated and interpreted according to the 52 domains identified during discussion. From these interpretations and meetings with the experts, valid conclusions were drawn.

Results and Discussion:
The 52 domains discussed in the research can be summarized into the following themes:

Practitioner’s profile:
The age and experience of practitioners, lineage, reason to learn, method and period of learning, books studied, transfer of knowledge, restrictions in life were discussed. The vishavaidya tradition of Kerala was maintained by imparting knowledge to the next generation through oral traditions and textual traditions. The tradition passed mainly through familial traditions and to a lesser extent to academically qualified practitioners attaining knowledge of traditional vishachikitsa from traditional practitioners. The role of hands-on-training and clinical exposure was equally important as the text-based learning in the evolution of Vishachikitsa tradition in Kerala.
History:

Najundanathar, Cherullypattar, Kokkara Namputhiri and Karattu Namputhiri are the personalities who played pivotal role in framing the structure of vishavaidya tradition in Kerala. Their knowledge of Sanskrit and other allied sciences contributed greatly to the development of the science. The interview survey revealed the modern history of vishachikitsa tradition in the post-independence era of India pertaining to the region of Kerala. Training of vishavaidya in an institutionalized way was not prevalent at those times and people used to get trained from the traditional healers and used to practice. There were no government regulations initially for such practices. Later State Government of Kerala conducted examinations to register as practitioners of the state. The pioneering work which led to the popularity of vishachikitsa came from the famous toxicologist and the member of Cochin Royal family, Sri. Kochunni Thampuran who authored the ‘Prayogasamuchayam’ which codified the most useful and practically feasible treatment practices for vishachikitsa. This treatment system earned the royal patronage through Midukkan Thampuran that was essential for its development.

Diagnosis:

The role of Doothalakshana, Jyotisha and Yogasasthra in vishachikitsa were discussed. Identification of Visha, Vegalakshana, signs of difficult prognosis and death, daily prevalence rate and predominance of poisonous bite were discussed. The signs and symptoms detailed for poisonous and non-poisonous bites matches perfectly with the explanation in modern texts in differentiating poisonous bite from non-poisonous bite. The findings from the discussions hints to the level of knowledge and understanding by the practitioners in these aspects.
Treatment:

Relevance of specific treatment modalities like Oothuchikitsa, Hridayavarana, Dhara, Kizhi, Anjana, Nasya, Lepa, Karuprayoga, Kakapada were discussed. Other important aspects in the management of Visha like Kaivisha, Dooshivisha, Sthavaravisha, Bhinnavisha, Prativisha and Jangama visha like Sarpa, Lootha, Mooshika, Alarka, Vrischika, Keetavisha and post-bite ulcer management were discussed in detail. Relevance of pathya, religious practices associated with vishachikitsa, Mantra prayoga, drugs and formulations used, Ottamooli (single drug) prayogas, Vishakallu therapy, rasayana chikitsaand application of vishahara formulations in other diseases were also analyzed. Reasons for decline of traditional vishachikitsa and chances of revival were also studied.

Conclusion:

The vast diversity of drugs, formulations used, therapies and concepts mentioned in vishachikitsa books of Kerala gives a clear evidence of the rich tradition, depth of knowledge and proficiency of ancient practitioners in this part of the country. More than 100 formulations, 31 prayogas, 32 symptomatic treatments and 25 concepts related to vishachikitsa are explained exclusively in Keraleeya vishachikitsa books which cannot be found in samhitas.

Vishachikitsasystem in Kerala approached the treatment aspect in a highly elaborated and practical way with more emphasis on symptom-wise management. It is more useful for the practitioners and can be used as a pocket reference guide in case of snake bite management. This is one of the main reasons for the popularity of this system of treatment. Many endemic species of the Western Ghats are mentioned in Keraleeya vishachikitsa books. The difference
of Keraleeya vishachikitsa from those mentioned in the Samhita is the elaborate use of local medicinal herbs for treatment.

It was difficult to maintain the livelihood of vishavaidya and his family without income. Reduced income in many middle- and upper-class families who practiced vishachikitsa was considered as the ill-effect of snakebite treatment which forced them to stop the service. The introduction of ASV is also considered to be a powerful reason for the decline of vishachikitsa. The reluctance in transfer of knowledge to the next generation and practice of vishachikitsa by quacks are also analyzed as major causes of decline. The chances of reviving the tradition were also discussed.

There are enough reasons to believe that prior to the propagation of Ayurvedic classics of Sanskrit in Kerala, there existed a more or less developed system of treatment and the Ayurvedic system and Sanskrit literary works that came later reformed this system and gave it a new form and structure. From the background of both these streams, a combined tradition which is purely indigenous to this geographical part of the country evolved and became immensely popular.
See more ideas about kerala, indian bridal hairstyles, kerala india. Ferraris of the Waterways of Kerala. Champakara Boat Race on 17th August 2007. This is held as a part of Onam Festival in Kerala. Onam is the biggest festival in Kerala. Onam Festival marks the homecoming of a legendary King Mahabali. The Carnival of Onam lasts for ten days and brings out the best of Kerala culture and tradition. Snake Boat Races, Pulikkilai and exotic Kaikottikali dance are some of the most remarkable features of Onam - the harvest festival in Kerala. Dates Taken on Augustâ€’e; Masala Chai. Conference: Kerala Muslim Heritage Studies History Conference 2013. At: JDT Islam Campus, Kozhikkode, Kerala, India. Authors: Shafeeq Hussain Vazhathodi Al-Hudawi. As per this idea, most of the educational systems and universities in Islamic world developed extensive combination of both religious and other types of sciences in their education system. According to the history of Islamic knowledge tradition of Kerala, this system of combination has somewhat prevailed from earlier times in pallidars. 101 works of 74 authors were used as the text books in pallidars. They include some texts in astronomy (ilmul falaque) and mathematics (ilmul hisab). They studied the astronomy, mathematics and history along with religious texts. This local literary tradition contrasts with the broadly known, canonical hagiographic tradition of Åšaá¹…kara, which states that during å€œthe conquest of the quarterså€ (skr. digvijaya), the philosopher reached four cor-ners of the Indian Peninsula, where he established four monastic centres (skr. maá¹ha å€œ monasteryå€) to propagate the Advaita VedÄnta doctrine. The geographic naming, including the names of the cities and villages, is a problematic issue in the landscape of Kerala due to its complex past and different foreign influences which were present there across the centuries. Thus, what we witness is a kind of historic palimpsest â€” the geographic Malayalam (malayÄḷam) names are influenced by such languages as Tamil, Portuguese, Dutch and English. Kerala being a land of all castes, communities and religions even from time immemorial, gives us a variety of interesting ritualistic dances. In Kerala most of the performing arts are rituals. Only a few have no connection with rituals. A great number of the folk forms have faced extinction over the period of time. And among these rituals the most important are the ceremonies connected with the Mother Goddess worship. The general opinion is that the worship of the Mother Goddess must have come down to the southern parts of India owing to the Aryan invasions. In addition to this aspect, that the invasions have influenced our customs, rituals, way of life and the literature in a significant way is a topic of interest with regard to the present art traditions prevalent in the regions of Kerala.